United Nations E/2016/NGO/80

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 May 2016

Original: English

2016 session
24 July 2015-27 July 2016
Agenda item 5
High-level segment

Statement submitted by Yakutia — Our Opinion, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Independent civil society organizations play a key role in successful building infrastructure for sustainable development for all because people express their opinion and will through them. Only multi-stakeholder partnership can reveal how people want to live.

Authorities of most countries mainly do not observe human rights without civil control.

Civil society is a guarantor to preserve balance of interests of state and society.

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country and the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.

Most countries ratified main international treaties and have appropriate social obligations but do not implement them accordingly. Majority in many countries can not realize right to decent life.

It is often consequence of low level of people's influence on decision-making and governance.

So, we primarily have to ensure for independent civil society organizations (CSOs) equal access to:

– decision-making and governance; and

– foreign and national funding sources to ensure financial independence.

Sometimes authorities of different countries violate these provisions.

Consider situation with example of Russia that is a country roughly and massively violating human rights. Russian authorities conduct discrimination policy and political reprisals against independent CSOs.

Government crackdown has established totalitarian dictatorship in Russia.

Russian officials created a lot of controlled CSOs and buffer quasi-state entities such as Civic Chamber, All-Russia People's Front and others. They negate acute problems and express pseudo-people interests. Proposals from independent CSOs are usually ignored.

It leads to distortion of real society needs and adoption of anti-people governance decisions. Living space in Russia (profitable business, high-paying jobs, lucrative public contracts) is distributed among officials and oligarchs, their relatives and friends. But majority of people live in poverty and hunger.

Russia's government uses civil society to legitimize anti-people state policy.

Control over financial flows to CSOs was also established. In most cases independent CSOs do not receive national grant funding including even they have competitive advantages. Budget funds belonging to all the people are mainly distributed among CSOs controlled by authorities on corrupted and non-transparent basis.

The adoption of 'Foreign Agents' law imposed illegal burdens and punitive sanctions for foreign-funded NGOs — 'foreign agents'.

These measures resulted in politically motivated restriction of activity of independent CSOs.

So Russian authorities, like similar regimes in other countries, violate citizen's rights to decision-making, governance, freedom of opinion and equal access to public budget.

In order to improve the situation, we must force Russia to do the following:

– repeal the 'foreign agents' law;

– ensure access of independent CSOs to decision-making and governance;

– ensure transparency of grant funding for NGOs on a competitive basis.

We urge United Nations bodies, Member States and stakeholders to take adequate coercive measures against Russia, that is, apply diplomatic, procedural, trade, financial and other sanctions.

The world community has to force other such countries as Russia to change legislation and state policy that restrict activity of independent CSOs according to international law.